[Sri A. J. John]

58. With a view to accelerating the educational progress of the backward classes, a new system of giving financial aid to students for the purchase of school requisites has been introduced. Accordingly students of the Middle School classes are given Rs. 25 each and those in the High School classes Rs. 40 each. Nearly 8,000 students were benefited by this scheme which has cost the Government over Rs. 3 lakhs. College students are either provided with free boarding and lodging or are given stipends at the rate of Rs. 45 per month besides the cost of books and other accessories.

59. The House Construction Scheme for the Backward classes which was started during the preceding year is progressing steadily. A total number of 285 houses costing Rs. 71,250 has been already constructed and families have settled in all of them. The construction of 435 houses has since been sanctioned and the work is in progress.

60. The provision made for the next year includes a sum of Rs. 3 lakhs for working out a ten year plan for the advancement of Backward Communities, Rs. 30,000 for welfare work among the Hill Tribes and Rs. 5·75 lakhs for other ameliorative measures.

Department of Co-operation

61. *Coir-Industry.*—The bulk of the coastal population of the State is dependent for their livelihood mainly on the coir industry. But this industry has never been able to provide full-time employment to those who are engaged in it. Government have sponsored a Coir Scheme to organise the industry on a co-operative basis. A Coir Special Officer with adequate executive and ministerial staff has been appointed. Government have ear-marked a sum of Rs. 1 lakh for working the scheme during this financial year. Twenty such co-operative societies have already started work and their progress is watched with keen interest. Steps are being taken for starting a Central Coir Marketing Society with Alleppey as head-quarters. Government wish to help these societies with an initial grant of Rs. 2,000 each in the first year and Rs. 1,000 in the second year to put them on their feet. A provision of Rs. 10 lakhs has been made for this purpose and a further sum of Rs. 50,000 for organisational expenses.

62. *Co-operative Milk Supply.*—To provide pure, unadulterated milk to the urban population of the State, a milk supply scheme has been launched and it is under way. There is a Milk Supply Centre at Trivandrum with five primary feeder societies. The centre supplies milk to 600 consumers in the City, the quantity of milk distributed daily being now more than 1,500 pounds.

63. *Housing.*—Government have embarked on a scheme of house construction spread over a period of years, in order to provide houses for industrial and agricultural labourers, fisher-folk, municipal menials and other homeless people. Considerable progress has been achieved and the scheme is pursued with enthusiasm and determination. A Housing Board has been constituted to deal with the problem in a systematic manner. The number of houses constructed till now is 181 and they are located in selected centres in different parts of the State.

Village Unions and Panchayats

64. The Village Unions and Panchayats have an important role in the realisation of "Grama-Swaraj." In this State there are at present 198 Village Unions, 107 Panchayats, 91 Village Uplift Centres and 64 Rural Reconstruction Centres. All these institutions have now been brought into the fold of a single department, *viz.*, the Panchayat Department. With a view to reconsituting the Village Unions and Panchayats a new Panchayat Act has been enacted. For the next financial year, an aggregate provision of Rs. 45·66 lakhs is included out of

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